

WRITTEN IN RED

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CHAPTER VI.

LIFE AFTER DEATH.

At eight o'clock in the evening of this same Friday, Medical Examiner Jarrett sat at his desk in the office at his house, busily writing.

"Upon making a careful and complete examination of the body of the man named Paul North, I find that a bullet, probably fired from a revolver of 32 caliber, at an angle of probably 20 degrees, and from a distance not exceeding three feet, entered his back near the spinal column at the seventh intercostal space on the right side, and passed in an inward and upward direction, going through the upper portion of the liver and completely through the lower lobe of the right lung.

"The path of the ball was not arrested, showing that it was fired in the direction indicated. It pierced the lung nearly opposite the third rib and left the body on the front side, just above the rib named.

"I do not find that the said Paul North could have committed suicide. The position of the entrance of the ball, and its direction, seemed to deny this possibility.

"There was ample external hemorrhage to have permitted the man to have written the words on the wall of the room in which he was found. If so, immediately the writing was concluded, he no doubt died.

"Death was painless, and resulted from internal hemorrhage, caused by the opening of an artery in the right lung."

"The ringing of the office bell suspended the report of the autopsy over Paul North's body at this point.

Dr. Jarrett rose to meet his caller, recognizing him at once as the reporter whom he had met a few hours previously at the house in Marlboro street.

"Ah, Thomas," he said, "still on the case, eh? A very good story, that of yours in the afternoon paper—very judicious indeed."

"Thanks," the reporter answered. "And now I want you to help me get out an equally good story, or a better one, for the morning. The autopsy was performed at the City Hospital morgue, of course. Can't you give me the report?"

Dr. Jarrett shook his head and rubbed his chin.

"There isn't a man I would sooner give out the report to than you, Thomas, but it wouldn't do to have it published before it's submitted. All I can say at this point really is that I have no doubt whatever that murder has been committed."

Mr. Thomas fingered his watch chain. "Not a word more?" he queried.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Thomas," the medical examiner answered, after a meditative turn up and down the hall. "You have kept a good many important secrets when the work of the authorities couldn't have been done without your silence. I'll tell you who assisted in the autopsy. You could interview him without mentioning my name in the matter."

A broad smile illumined the reporter's face, and he presented the medical examiner with a very comprehensive wink.

"Dr. Francis Huntress is the man," continued the examiner, confidentially. "He has an office where he lives, at No. —Greenwich Park."

"I know him well," said Mr. Thomas, as he parted from the doctor; and there was full justification for the words in the friendly greeting accorded to him at the surgeon's door.

Two minutes after he had pulled at the bell handle, Thomas was comfortably ensconced in an easy-chair in the doctor's study, the physician sitting opposite to him at his desk, where a drop light burned.

"You are the most extraordinary fellow," the surgeon exclaimed, admiringly, after Thomas had stated his mission. "Some of the morgue people must have told you I was called in. No? Well, never mind—I'll assume you divined it, as you have a hundred other matters supposed to be the most profound of secrets. But I'll tell you one thing, my black-haired friend. This is one of the most curious and remarkable cases that ever came to my attention!"

"You have no doubt it was a case of murder?" questioned Mr. Thomas, busy with his watch chain.

"I can find no other explanation. You saw the wound; you noticed how the man lay? Now the bullet was a 32 caliber pistol ball. It entered at an angle of certainly no less than 20 degrees, and went upwards and inwards in that direction. I don't know whether you observed any traces of powder on the man's clothing?"

"No."

"They were there, nevertheless. And that means that the pistol from which the fatal shot was fired couldn't have been held more than three feet away. At the same time we concluded it must have been more than two. And this, you see, effectually disposes of the theory of suicide."

"And now, doctor, I want to ask you two or three questions. In the first place, isn't it within the possibilities of medical science to determine just how long a man has been dead?"

"Anywhere within 24 or 36 hours, probably yes."

"With how much accuracy?"

"Well, possibly within an hour."

"As close as that?"

"I believe that most surgeons and physicians accept the proposition of an eminent surgeon and chemist who stated a few years ago that the day will come when we may first determine the general health of the subject by examination of the other organs, and then submit the clotted blood in the heart to microscopic tests. The blood, you know, is made up of three parts—the serum, the red and white corpuscles. The red corpuscles contain the life. That life remains for several days after death if the body is without disease to

induce overrapid decomposition. The length of time which has elapsed since the heart ceased to beat may be determined by the amount of life in the red corpuscles. The same test is also applied to the contents of the other vessels."

"Have these tests been applied in this case, doctor?"

"Yes; but merely as an experiment to compare with the other tests applied. I am happy to say they showed, in a measure, the probable reliability of the theory."

"And what were those other tests?"

"Most bodies become quite cold in from eight to twelve hours after death. In the cases of bodies which present certain signs that I need not detail, we know that death has not been present more than 12 hours. In from 12 to 18 hours, however, the eyeballs become soft and inelastic and feel flaccid. The last sign of the earliest stage of death is the rigor mortis. This is, perhaps, the most dependable of the signs we have to guide us at present. Of course, the rigidity of the body may continue beyond a week, but the circumstances which would occasion this would be too extraordinary to be unnoted. Considering all these things, I should repeat that the length of time which Mr. North has been dead is tolerably certain."

"And from this, when did you determine that Mr. North had died?"

"Perhaps Dr. Jarrett would object to my giving that information to the press," said the surgeon, hesitatingly.

"Then don't give it to the press. Give it to me."

Thomas smiled insiduously.

"And you—what will you do with it?"

"Compare it with other information as I already possess, to see if my suspicions are correct."

"You suspect somebody?"

"Everybody."

"Then I understand that this communication is confidential?" he asked.

"Decidedly, for the present."

"In that case, I don't mind telling you that we came to the conclusion that Mr. North was shot between eight and nine o'clock last night."

"Of course, you know about that strange writing on the wall?"

"Yes," was the answer; "Dr. Jarrett said there was no doubt that a name was scrawled there, and that the writing was in blood."

"Do you think Mr. North could have written it himself?"

"Well, that's a leading question," answered the surgeon, as he leaned back in his chair. "I did not see the writing."

"No?" said Thomas. He unrolled the photographer's proof. "Well, there it is—natural size, just as it looks."

The surgeon scrutinized the scrawl with great interest.

"Well, this is most extraordinary," he said. "Why, you can plainly mark how many times he was obliged to dip his finger by the corresponding heaviness of outline. Observe the S, the A, the H, and finally the letter following the u, where his strength seems suddenly to have deserted him and the finger dragged downwards. That makes four times."

"Yes, if he wrote it," said Thomas. "But how about that, doctor?"

"There is, at least, no conclusive reason why he might not have written it himself. It was certainly done with his

finger. A careful examination of the end of that finger convinces me that it had not only been dipped in blood, but thereafter drawn over a surface while wet. The difference in the degree of the stain at different parts of the finger indicates that. How far above the floor is this writing?"

"Just about a foot and a half. It is a tinted wall, and the writing is immediately above the footboard."

"Was the writing horizontal? Did it run just parallel with the footboard?"

"Just about."

"If a man had directed this writing from a higher point, Thomas, he would have written back handed. How was the slope of the letters?"

"Natural."

"And have you seen any specimens of North's handwriting? Does he form his letters that way?"

"Yes; as nearly as could be expected under the circumstances."

"Then I should say," said the surgeon, rising, "that it is more than probable that North wrote it."

"But with a wound like that," suggested the reporter, "death must have been instantaneous."

"Ah, there you have failed to distinguish between speedy death and instantaneous death. What is commonly called instantaneous death—from a shot in the heart, for instance—is by no means such. A second is an hour to a dying man. On the other hand, the severing of the spinal column by a bullet would actually cut a thought in two.

Man goes into the presence of his Maker under such circumstances without an instant to prepare himself. But in a case like North's we must take into consideration the power of the human will to prolong life."

"But this writing on the wall was not an act of memory."

"No. But with thought in a man of strong purpose would come quick determination. If the power to act, even at that moment. You must bear in mind that Mr. North's death was caused by the filling of his lungs with blood instead of air. It was a painless death, and Mr. North's will power would have enabled him to prolong his life 60 seconds—perhaps even 180 seconds—ample time for the writing of this name on the wall, as you can see. Take the name Paul North; trace it slowly, as if you had to dip your finger in the writing fluid four times. There. Now time yourself. How long did it take you?"

"Just 25 seconds," said Mr. Thomas.

"Exactly. Now you understand the possibilities in this matter of the writing; and I tell you, Thomas, this talk with you only confirms and emphasizes my belief that here you have a great case—one of the most extraordinary in my experience. If you can put what I've told you to good use, I shall be glad; but mind, I shall not look to see it in the morning papers."

The surgeon had arisen and was accompanying the reporter to the door. Thomas stopped him by a restraining gesture.

"By the way, doctor, stand just as you are. Now will you put your finger on that part of your body corresponding to that where Paul North was shot?"

The surgeon obliged him, Thomas, standing behind him, made several rapid measurements and calculations with his eye and hand.

"There is something decidedly curious here, doctor," he said. "Stand behind me, please. Suppose me your intended victim. If it's not too great a strain on your imagination. Now see where you must hold your pistol to comply with all conditions—within three feet, pointed upward at an angle of 20 degrees!"

The surgeon, who hastened to attempt the experiment, uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Curious how much a man may miss when he thinks he has observed the whole, sometimes," he said. "Why, I never thought of this before."

"What doctor?"

"The man who fired that ball must have been upon his knees."

"Precisely! Precisely!" exclaimed Thomas. "Just my thoughts exactly."

What sane person would fire a pistol at a man in any such direction in an erect attitude? It would be almost equally absurd if the assassin had been seated."

"You are right," returned the surgeon, thoughtfully. "He might have been crouching behind some article of furniture."

"Or been previously knocked down!" Thomas interposed, turning a very meaning look upon the surgeon's face.

"So, indeed! That would indicate, then, a struggle to your mind?"

"It would indicate that the murderer fired in self-defense, or from momentary passion induced by North's treatment of him."

When Thomas found himself in the cool air of the June night again, he hastened at a round pace in the direction of Newspaper Row. He was near the door of his own office when a man jumped from a horse car and tapped him upon the shoulder. It was Detective John Lamm, direct from Swampscott.

"What's your hurry, Kingman?" he inquired, with the easy assurance of a familiar acquaintance. "Come up into my office a few minutes. I want to talk with you."

Reporter Thomas consulted his watch. "The fact is, old man," he said, with a frank smile, "I'm rather driven to-night. It's that North mystery, you understand."

"How do you know that isn't the very matter I wanted to talk with you about?" returned Mr. Lamm, taking the reporter's arm with good-humored insistence, and escorting him, half-reluctantly, to his own private den, as he called it.

"Kingman, I know you, and you know me," said the detective, after they were fairly settled in their chairs. "It came to me when I saw you just now that we might work this case together. It wouldn't be the first case we have handled together, eh?"

"You're right," said Thomas.

"Now, I'm interested in this North mystery very particularly, you understand," pursued Mr. Lamm, quite warming to his subject, now that he was closeted with a tried friend, and at an hour when he was reasonably secure from interruption. "Not for the government, of course. Private parties. And my opinion, gathered from all I have been able to ascertain about the case, is that it is very mysterious, very complicated, and may baffle even the most thorough investigation."

Thomas pursed up his lips, and regarded the gas jet doubtfully.

"You don't think so, eh?"

"When I hear what Thornton Stackhouse's alibi is, I can answer you better."

"Alibi, eh? So you have the medical examination report? Good! Just what I was after. When did North die?"

The reporter laughingly parried this query with another.

"Do you suppose I have the doctor's report on the autopsy in my coat pocket?"

Mr. Lamm ventured to express a shrewd suspicion that his friend did possess, by some fortunate chance or other, the essential facts of that report, and Mr. Thomas glitely justified that suspicion by letting him know, in strict confidence, the outcome of his interview with the surgeon.

The detective uttered a long, low whistle.

"Curious! Mighty curious!" he commented.

"If you'll be so good as to give me an opportunity," suggested Thomas, "I'll be pleased to ejaculate with you."

"Um—ha! You said a moment ago, Thomas, that your opinion of the case would depend upon the alibi of Thornton Stackhouse. What would you say if I told you that the said gentleman elsewhere has one weak spot in it, involving the precise period of time that you have mentioned?"

"I should say nothing, but remain in

hourly expectation of Thornton Stackhouse's arrest."

"Very well. See that you do say nothing for the secret is yours and mine at present. And so you have already convicted the poor fellow?"

John Lamm took one of the cigars which stood upright in the upper pocket of his vest, and drew a match against the under side of his chair, which was tipped back against the wall.

"I must confess," Thomas replied, "that it looks to me something that way."

"Oh, indeed, yes. The evidence is strong—even stronger, probably, than you know—against him. But then—"

In lieu of continuing, Lamm lit his cigar.

"Thomas, what is your definition of a good theory of a mystery?" he suddenly inquired, as he threw the match from him.

"I don't know that I ever thought of defining it."

"Well, I'll tell you what mine is. A good theory is one which thoroughly explains all the facts in the case."

"Short and comprehensive," said Thomas.

"I subscribe to it. That's my idea. Now, is there any fact in the case, so far known, inconsistent with Thornton Stackhouse being the man?"

"None at all."

"Ah! And yet I can see plainly enough that you don't subscribe to my opinion. Is there any fact which the supposition of his guilt leaves unexplained?"

"There is one fact which the supposition of his guilt does not explain."

"Well, now we are coming to the point. What is it?"

"It doesn't explain to my mind why a certain individual of my acquaintance should be so anxious to convict him."

"Name the man."

"It would be a breach of professional etiquette. But as you and I are old friends, Thomas, and never betray each other's confidences, I don't mind saying to you that, if you can get hold of any facts tending to explain Mr. Richard Pettigrew's strong interest in this case, I shall be exceedingly obliged if you will bring them to me."

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Thomas, opening his eyes; "there is more in this case, then, than I thought!"

And when he left the room after a half-hour's further conversation, it was with the conviction that, unless some unexpected thing happened to determine otherwise, the North mystery would turn out to be a complication worthy of his best thought and his most skillful treatment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INSPECTOR DISCOVERS NEW EVIDENCE.

The Friday when the body of Paul North was discovered, and the day following, were two exceedingly busy days for the police department, under the active superintendence and guidance of Inspector Applebee.

Again and again he had examined every nook and corner, turning his bull's-eye upon the recesses of every trunk and box, sounding every cask and receptacle, making sure that nowhere within the four walls of Paul North's home was hidden the weapon which had caused Paul North's death.

It was with rather a puzzled countenance and a mind unsettled and ill at ease that about noon on Saturday he sought a conference with his chief at headquarters; for even Inspector Applebee had his superior officer.

"Well, Applebee!" said the chief inspector, as the door was closed, and the two men found themselves alone in this little office; "are you prepared to make any arrests? What's on your mind? Have you found out anything?"

"Found out anything? I've found out too much. There's just the trouble. When I woke up this morning my mind was settled. Four hours' work and it's all at sea again. Fully prepared to make an arrest to-day, I've now reached a point where I don't know whom to suspect, or what to think."

"Well, take this morning for a starting point. When we separated last night, you were sure the partner was our man."

"I was. In the first place, North seemed to have written his name on the wall in his own blood. Now, it strikes me that an accusation made at the moment of death is a very solemn one. A man isn't likely at such a time to indulge in feelings of petty spite or practical joking, is he, now?"

"I should say not, decidedly. But why were you so sure that he wrote it?"

"Because the doctors say he could have done it, and that there are few circumstances of death like that under which such a thing could happen. And it strikes me that to assume somebody else did it in face of such a report is taking too much advantage of what must be in that case a remarkable coincidence."

"Coincidences happen," said the chief, shortly.

"So they do. But in nine hundred and ninety-nine chances out of a thousand, if a murderer endeavored to throw us off by such a ruse, the medical examiner would discover the trick at a glance, and denounce the writing as a fraud."

"Even so. How do you know what North had in his mind to write? He might have started in to declare 'Stackhouse is my executor,' or 'Stackhouse inherits my property,' or 'Stackhouse is—' anything else you may please to imagine."

"True," said Applebee, doubtfully.

"And then, again, we are not unquestionably sure that the writing is intended for Stackhouse, are we?"

"After two hours of inspection and experiment, I am fully persuaded that it cannot be anything else."

"And how does Stackhouse himself impress you?"

"Confound the man! He puzzles me. I had a long talk with him this morning. He carries a 32 caliber pistol. There are no signs of its having been recently discharged."

"I presume he knows how to clean it," said the chief inspector, dryly.

"No doubt and how to fire it, too. But what good does that do us? I put the case to him plainly. I said: 'Stackhouse, this is no time for conventionalities. People are beginning to talk. Better clear it up at once by giving me an alibi.' Shoot me, if he didn't say that between eight and nine, when Jarrett says North was shot, he was walking in the Public Garden alone, smoking a cigar."

"Looks bad."

"So it does. But the queerest thing is that he is not living at home. Where did Thornton Stackhouse spend last night? At his house at the beach, where the woman he would certainly be expected to need him at such a time as this, of all times? No, sir. At the Adams house."

"That means trouble in the family."

"And very serious trouble. Men quarrel with their wives often enough; but not often under such circumstances as these."

"How did you find the family?"

"Frightened to death. Stupid. Idiotic. Stackhouse's wife alone preserves her senses, and she is a tartar. She seemed to take my visit as a personal affront, and read me a lecture on propriety. I confess I lost my temper. 'Do you intend to hinder justice all you can, or to help it?' I said. 'It's not in my province to do either,' she said, with a defiant look in her eye. 'I shall let justice take its course.' I can forgive a young woman with plenty of money for doing a great deal, but there's such a thing as overdoing the high and mighty. I couldn't imagine what made her seem so unmoved by her father's death till I learned that she's not his daughter after all."

"Not?"

"An adopted child."

"Adopted at what age?"

"Took her out of the Temporary Home in Charles street when she was a year old."

"Watch that woman."

"You may be sure I shall."

"How about the other daughter?"

"She's his own daughter, but I didn't see her. I was provoked to understand she was completely governed by her father's death. She is between 17 and 18 years old, and I doubt if she could help us at all."

"But all this doesn't explain what has unsettled your ideas about Stackhouse. So far you have only confirmed your own suspicions."

"Ah, but there have been several new facts. At an early hour this morning, I deputed two men to make a thorough canvass of the neighborhood for the purpose of ascertaining whether anybody had been seen going in or coming out of the North house on the night of the murder. Unfortunately the people who live directly to have observed that anybody else, left for Newport yesterday morning. Still, we have found a servant girl, Hannah Doyle, who lives several houses further down. This woman positively declares that when she was returning home after dark about half-past nine on Thursday night, she saw a woman—a young woman, she believes—come down the steps of the North house and walk away."

"The deuce she did! Can she not be mistaken in the house?"

"She says not. What made her notice the woman and remember the circumstance was the peculiar fact that anybody should be coming out of a house boarded up for the summer. And no other house for several doors except the North house is boarded up."

"This is important, Applebee."

"I think so."

"Half-past nine must have been later than the murder. Consequently the woman must have been the criminal or an accomplice."

"She could not have failed to know that North had been killed even if she had no part in the deed. The fact that she gave no alarm—has not spoken a word since—declares her complicity."

"It seems proof positive."

"Another fact, if you please. I have discovered that North had somewhere in his possession a 32 caliber pistol. That pistol was presumably in the Marlboro street house on the night of the murder. I have searched the premises from top to bottom without finding a trace of it."

"That has an odd look, too."

"But," continued Applebee, with a meaning emphasis, "I did find the box of cartridges—nearly filled—in a drawer of the writing desk in the library where the man was shot. The drawer was closed, but the box was open."

"Important," said the chief inspector, quickly. "Important. Now, how thorough has been your search of the premises?"

"I did not take any chances. I took two men with me. We even visited the coal bins and examined the ash barrels in detail. Stackhouse has been eager to afford us any help. He has even given us every key we asked for. The search has been thorough. The pistol is not there."

"So then it only remains to discover who that woman was."

"So it seems."

"Have you no clew?"

"Just one."

"Of what nature?"

"A perfume. To be sure, there is a handkerchief, but it is unmarked and I have inquired at the stores where they sell such things, to no purpose. I told you where and when I found that bit of lace. It was upon the stairs, between the second and third floors, not a great many steps from the door of the library, and it had not been lying there any fifteen days, which is the length of time the family have been away."

"How do you know?"

"Bliss you, I took it to a chemist. He assured me that to be so fresh as that within two days at the longest. It is one of those volatile preparations that soon lose their strength."

"I don't see but your chain is complete, then, so far as it goes. No man ever carried that handkerchief. It must have been dropped by a woman. The woman was seen coming away after the hour at which the crime was committed. You haven't forgotten that perfume, I trust."

"Assuredly not. If I ever get near enough to the woman who uses it—not apt to pay me a visit."

"You must visit her, then. Meanwhile, what about the threatening letter which was written to North a week or two previous to the crime?"

"Bliss me! I had nearly forgotten it. But what are we to do? The decoy letter is still unclaimed at the post office."

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